



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
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Olympia, Washington 98504-7990*

January 28, 2004

Representative Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney  
Chair, House Higher Education Committee  
Post Office Box 40600  
203 John L. O'Brien Building  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Dear Representative Kenney,

We are writing to support House Bill 2700, relating to bringing state law into conformity with 2003 United States supreme court affirmative action decisions, scheduled to be heard before your committee today.

We support the bill proposed as a way of helping to promote the diversity of our health workforce. Research shows greater health workforce diversity is likely to lead to fewer disparities in health status among Washington's increasingly diverse communities. The State Board of Health's Committee on Health Disparities found that:

- Communities of color in Washington State experience substantial inequities in terms of burden of disease.
- Research demonstrates that minority providers may be more effective in addressing cultural, linguistic and trust issues that exist for many minority patients. What is more, health outcomes can be improved when the race and ethnicity of health professionals reflects the populations they serve.
- Health professionals from underserved communities, both minority and rural, are much more likely to return to and serve those communities.
- The number and percentage of ethnic and minority health care professionals are seriously underrepresented when compared to the overall population of the State;
- Not all health care professional shortages are uniform across the state – underserved, minority and rural communities are likely to feel this shortage more acutely and for longer periods;

Because of these findings, the Board supports the goal of clarifying colleges and universities' ability to use race and ethnicity, as part of a holistic review of applicants' qualities and experiences.

A more holistic review of applicants' qualities and experiences is beneficial not just for less privileged individuals, but also for Washington as a whole. Allowing more racially and ethnically diverse youth and adults the opportunity to become part of the health workforce, through higher education, is likely to reduce health disparities through improved health care access, health care quality and health outcomes.

Sincerely,



Linda Lake, M.B.A.  
Chair, Washington State Board of Health



Vickie Ybarra, R.N., M.P.H.  
Member, Washington State Board of Health

cc: House Higher Education Committee Members  
Senator Don Carlson  
Washington State Board of Health Members  
Mich'l Prentice Needham, Governor's Executive Policy Office  
Steve Meyer, Department of Health